US edition

ILO INFORMATION

Published in Geneva, Volume 19, No. 5, December 1991

The International Labor Office is the permanent secretariat of the 150-member International Labor Organization, a United Nations specialized agency.

Eastern Europe faces up to reform

Photo: J. Maillard/ILO

Since the exhilarating days of 1989 and 1990, a more sober mood of consolidation has spread across the Central and Eastern European region as the enormity of the challenge of structural change confronts a new generation of political leaders and policy-makers.

Recent events have rekindled hopes for rapid restructuring in the Soviet Union, but with the new uncertainties there will surely be a prolonged period before welfare and incomes substantially improve. In social as well as climatic terms, a harsh winter has set in.

Remodeling an economic and social system which has stood impervious to change for decades is a tremendous undertaking. It requires a rapid learning process, as new administrations and the slowly emerging new institutions and independent organizations of employers and workers seek to compress into as short a period as possible their mastery of a vast array of policy options which took the western industrialized countries four decades or more to develop.

No country has an ideal set of laws and social institutions which can be transplanted intact in any other. There has to be a process of adapting and adopting.

This process of "transmission and transition" raises complex challenges for the international community as well as for those at national level who must make the decisions that will shape the future. It calls for an active partnership between international organizations and the emerging democracies.

The following pages give a glimpse of the ILO's involvement in this vital process of reform in Central and Eastern Europe. The Organization is devising new approaches to deal with a wholly new development situation. In doing so, it draws upon an unequaled experience at the heart of the struggle for social justice across the globe throughout the best part of a convulsive century. ■

Restructuring the labor market

In 1990-91, the Central and East European economies were hit by a cruel combination of economic factors that have made structural adjustment much harder to achieve. The enormous declines in GDP in 1990 and 1991 have to be seen in the context of the collapse of trade between the countries themselves, the inflationary and recessionary impact of energy price and the adverse effects of the recession in the industrialized market economies.

Reform policies, particularly those concerned with economic stabilization, have at most merely compounded the slump. At the end of the 1980s, GDP per capita in the region overall was probably no more than one-eighth of the average in the rest of Europe. Yet in 1990 real GDP probably fell by over seven per cent, and in 1991 it will fall by well over 10 per cent.

These stark realities would have caused very severe labor market problems in any country, whatever the structural adjustment strategy. Yet despite the enormous declines in aggregate economic output, the overall employment decline has been relatively modest. Had such declines in national income occurred in industrialized market economies, the cut-back in jobs and the rise in unemployment would have long since raised specters of the Great Depression. So far, that has not happened in Eastern and Central Europe. However, with the gathering pace of privatization and the decline of the famous "soft budget" constraint, there will be a spate of redundancies from the large State enterprises in all the countries of the region. Unless labor shedding occurs on a vast scale, productivity levels will remain disappointingly low, economic growth will be curtailed and the growth of new industries oriented to consumer goods and services will be unduly constrained.

It was against this background that politicians, government officials, employer and trade union leaders and economists from both sides of the Atlantic were convened by the ILO and the OECD in Paris last September, to examine the labor market and social policy implications of structural change in Central and Eastern Europe.

They included Czechoslovakia's Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Petr Miller; Poland's Minister of Labor, Michal Boni; Alexander Kosmarski, Deputy Minister of Labor of the Russian Republic; Ray Marshall, former US Secretary of Labor; AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland; and leaders of European employers' and workers' organizations. All 24 OECD countries were represented by senior government officials, and senior staff of the World Bank, the IMF, the European Commission and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development also took part.

Responding to unemployment will be a high priority in the region in 1992, they concluded. It is indeed likely that very high levels – probably over 15 per cent – will continue for a long time.

The fears associated with unemployment are very real. There is strong reason for believing that the extent of poverty in many parts of the region has grown to alarmingly high levels.

For these and many other reasons, labor market policies will figure prominently in Eastern and Central Europe in the next few years, as they have in Western Europe over the past decade.

They will be expected to:

- cut unemployment;
- reduce labor market segmentation and the disadvantaged position of various groups in society;
- promote geographical, occupational and industrial mobility; and
- raise labor productivity.

And underlying everything, they will be expected to move the labor market from over-full and low productivity employment to a combination of low unemployment and high productivity employment.

In the initial stages of the reform process in many of the countries of the region, the striking feature of government responses was the passage of comprehensive "framework" employment laws. The USSR's Fundamentals of Employment Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics came into effect in July 1991; individual Republics have introduced their own versions of an employment law. In the CSFR, the Law on Employment was introduced in 1991, and in Hungary the strands of earlier partial reforms were integrated in a comprehensive law on employment introduced last February. There and elsewhere, such laws have created the basis for a wide array of labor market policies, ranging from income transfers to public works and labor market retraining schemes. In essence, they represent the first steps to a new form of regulated labor market.

The whole range of measures contained in the new employment laws correspond reasonably closely to recent policy developments in the West. Increasingly, governments feel that labor market policies should not rely on one or another instrument but that the mix of measures makes a difference. The crucial issue is how to develop a policy mix that combines income protection for the unemployed with reintegration into productive and gainful employment, without contravening principles of freedom in the labor market.

To function adequately, all these policies depend on the existence of an adequate network of employment services, including labor exchanges. Nowhere in Eastern and Central Europe has such a network existed. Great efforts – and in some cases considerable international financial assistance – have been devoted to developing them. Until they have taken shape – and perhaps not even then – it will be difficult to estimate unemployment accurately or to operate conditional unemployment benefits with even reasonable efficiency. ■

Active partnership for change

An "active partnership" between international organizations and the emerging democracies is needed to tackle the problems of looming joblessness, inflation and insecurity in Central and Eastern Europe, ILO Director-General Michel Hansenne told the ILO/OECD meeting.

Very serious social and labor problems lie in wait for restructuring countries in this area, he said. Production and incomes have plummeted and 22 million people could find themselves without a job next year. The very social fabric risks dislocation.

But, he added, "we shouldn't heed the Cassandras who tell us that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe need at least a generation to build a dynamic economy. ... We can be confident that they will make their economic takeoff by the end of this century."

Productivity is the key. In the 90s, productivity increases will be achieved through flexible production systems, smaller decentralized enterprises and workers with better skills, who should be associated with decision-taking at all stages. He pledged the ILO's sponsorship for an exchange between governments, employers and workers in Central and Eastern Europe and their counterparts in the industrialized world who have set up flexible and participatory production systems, the foundation for increased productivity.

Higher productivity may lead to increased joblessness, Mr. Hansenne warned. In order to face up to this serious problem, three conditions need to be met:

- active employment policies based on flexible training facilities, encouragement to labor mobility and growth of self-employment and small enterprises;
- improved social security. "Social want and distress are attaining unbearable proportions. ... And we know that, once an individual becomes marginal, he finds it very hard to rejoin society, particularly the labor market";
- a framework for the social and economic partners to meet and negotiate, on the model of tripartism as practised by the ILO.

"A jointly discussed and decided incomes policy," Mr. Hansenne said, "can play a capital role in the transition period. It can help to subdue inflationary pressures, increase labor productivity, and keep inequalities within bounds that are compatible with dynamic economic growth."

"The challenge," he said, "will be to find ways for the State to give the population some basic security, especially of employment, while guaranteeing freedom of choice and enhancing everyone's chances of participating fully in the life of society."

A new approach to aid

The changes currently occurring in Central and Eastern Europe involve enormous efforts at all levels. Behind the huge and still uncertain political and economic upheaval spotlighted daily by the media, other transformations are taking place which are less noticeable but no less important, because they will in large measure shape an emerging free and responsible society.

In order to adjust to an open economy governed by market laws, enterprises must be freed of government control and competent managers must be trained; to deal with rising unemployment, a real labor market must be re-established, efficient employment services created, vocational training and orientation re-evaluated; to guarantee respect for the rights and interests of all, representative and independent organizations of employers and workers capable of negotiating between themselves must be encouraged to grow and flourish. Like those improvements needed for social security systems and for occupational health and safety, these changes imply a revision of structures and laws, but even more a progressive change of attitudes, a change of conscience which will gradually transform workers and citizens from passive wheels in the machinery into informed and dynamic members of society.

The culmination of such a process, if the conditions for success fall into place, should be a reordering and a strengthening of the social fabric, the surest guarantee against the temptation to take a step backward. This is why it is now urgent to make haste.

To this impressive task the countries of Western Europe and more extensively of the OECD are already bringing to bear their combined efforts. More than 150 bilateral co-operation projects in the area of social and employment policy have been so far recorded by the ILO; they involve 12 European countries in addition to Australia, Canada, the United States and Japan. In Poland, for example, Belgium, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden and the United States are providing advice and assistance in the creation and strengthening of employment services; again in Poland, 16 donor nations are engaged in management training. The European Community and various international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank are equally involved.

The ILO does not intend to be a passive observer of changes which are taking place in the name of the very principles upon which it is founded. Indeed — notably in the framework of the last two International Labor Conferences — the ILO has received numerous and pressing requests from the social partners of Central and Western European countries.

As early as June 1990 ILO Director-General Michel Hansenne stated that the Organization is "the natural meeting-place" for the ministries of employment and labor concerned. "In all the areas of interest to them — labor legislation, employment, labor relations, social security, occupational health and safety — the ILO can facilitate contacts and co-operation at the European level," he added. This opportunity for meeting and for dialog has since been used on numerous occasions, and a project has been set up for systematic exchange of information between European countries.

Further, without taking the place of bilateral aid, the ILO has put in motion a series of extremely varied projects and actions for the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, both at the national and the sub-regional levels: consultation and advisory missions on labor legislation, and study visits, conferences, seminars, courses, and direct assistance to the social partners, projects in the promotion of small- and medium-scale enterprises and in the reorganization of employment services, social security or vocational training systems, and assistance in the development of industrial relations.

This aid is financed in large part by the special contributions of certain Western

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Photo: J. Maillard/ILO

For the transition to a free-market economy, training, retraining, and vocational orientation programs must be reorganized, with special emphasis on youth and women workers.

READEX FICHE

ILO aids drive to boost productivity

A major ILO study of 1,500 enterprises has begun in the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria to generate the basic information needed by policy-makers and managers to raise enterprise efficiency and labor productivity.

In the USSR, the ILO has assembled a large team of researchers led by Mrs. Iraida Manykina, chief labor statistician of Goskomstat, the USSR State Committee on Statistics, to carry out a detailed survey of labor practices and policies in 500 industrial enterprises in three regions of the country. The Soviet researchers, with little or no experience of statistical surveys as carried out in industrialized market economies, have been trained in new approaches to labor data and labor market analysis and the concepts underlying them.

An ILO team visited the USSR in October at the start of the project. In St. Petersburg, a city where aggregate output has fallen by about a third in the past year, it found that raising labor productivity is a major challenge. One factory management reported a 17 per cent labor turnover rate for 1991, despite having tripled wages in the past nine months.

At another factory, manufacturing heavy machine tools, the team found the management in somber mood. Hit by the cutback in military industries on which it had relied, and by the dislocation in inter-republic economic relations, it is running at a loss. Management has hopes of forming a joint stock company, and in anticipation of layoffs they had conducted their own survey of their 4,000 workers, asking what they would do if their jobs were lost; 90 per cent said this was the government's problem, not theirs, and only 10 per cent expressed a willingness to retrain.

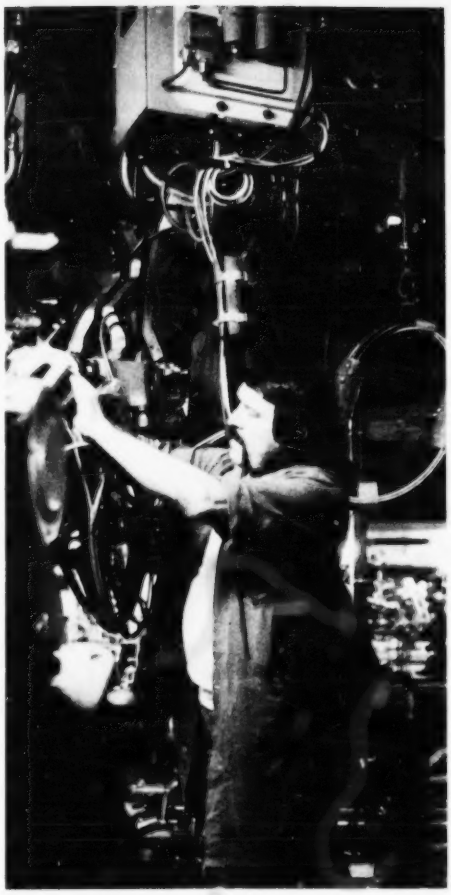

Photo J. Maillard ILO

"Such attitudes will have to change," says Guy Standing, leader of the ILO team. "The sense of crisis in such places is intense. The economic and social problems facing the Soviet Union are writ large in the State-owned enterprises that still account for the bulk of employment.

"The managers, government officials, economists and workers we talked to are acutely conscious of the need for reform," he confirms. "They warmly welcome the help the ILO is now giving."

Once the survey fieldwork is completed, the ILO team will return to the USSR to help with analysis of the data, which will provide information on privatization, changing employment levels and structures, remuneration systems, recruitment practices, training, labor productivity, employers' use of subcontracting and part-time work, and the situation of youth, women and pensioners.

"The survey will reveal what actually happens to people when a gigantic centrally-planned system changes course toward the unknown destination of a market economy," Mr Standing comments. "Nothing of this kind has been attempted on anything like this scale." Similar surveys have been set in motion with the ILO's help in Hungary and Bulgaria, again covering 500 enterprises in each country.

One outcome of the surveys will be detailed reports to governments proposing specific labor policy reforms on enterprise restructuring, and advice to managements on measures they can take at plant level to facilitate the transition. ■

A new approach to aid

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countries. At present, six donors – in order of importance: the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Canada and the United Kingdom – have already committed more than six million dollars for this purpose.

The technical co-operation program developed over the years by the ILO for the developing countries is affected neither at the financial nor operational levels by the opening of this new front of activities. Quite the contrary. Drawing on experience gained from Third World programs and taking into account the special conditions of Eastern European countries, the ILO is determined to develop a new approach to aid which could serve to renew traditional concepts.

Firstly, each action carried out responds to a precise need, timely and to the point, determined by the beneficiaries, in the framework of a policy over which the countries receiving aid have full control at all times. Through consultations, targeted training, or the advice of experts, for example, the technical "helping hand" desired comes into play at exactly the right time. This achieves a real collaboration, a partnership in which the acquired knowledge, competence and intentions of the country requesting aid remain the priorities.

Secondly, this ILO aid, often modest in comparison with the size of bilateral projects, intends to be complementary to and not competitive with programs carried out by other agencies. For example, by making available comparative studies, by training national officers or trainers, or by helping to put in place a legislative framework, the ILO contributes to the coordination and smooth functioning of the various sectors where changes are taking place.

Thirdly, ILO aid is directed as much to the social partners as to governments and their administrations. By virtue of its tripartite structure, the ILO has direct contact with national trade unions and the emerging employers' organizations. In all the countries concerned, even more than in the Third World, the ILO is the repository and model of the tripartism which was paralyzed by the previous systems in Eastern Europe and whose rediscovered dynamism is one of the key factors in successful change. Finally, throughout the course of this activity, the ILO serves as a kind of middle man, a "mediator" between beneficiary and donor countries, each of which has its own objectives and interests. By virtue of its international character, the ILO offers not only a "neutral ground" where the needs of each of the parties is expressed, but also the storehouse of its accumulated experience, which allows the ILO to expand and enrich mutual co-operation.

It should be added that, to carry out its aid activities properly, the Organization has unique and irreplaceable technical tools at its disposition: the body of International Labor Standards – 172 Conventions and 179 Recommendations adopted since 1919 – a veritable "Bible" for labor legislators worldwide; an effective system of supervision of the application of these instruments; and finally, the International Training Center in Turin and the International Institute for Labor Studies in Geneva which, for nearly 30 years, have formed thousands of middle-management personnel, trainers and senior labor administration officials throughout the world. ■

Turin: training through dialog

An instructor on trade union issues posed a common question for a group of uncommon students:

"A collective-bargaining agreement contains a whole range of terms and conditions of employment. Can you list some of the terms of such an agreement?"

A participant exclaimed: "Health and safety!" Another man said, "Duration of the agreement" and still another offered "Wages."

Photo: G.P. Brandi/ILO Turin

Before this session was over, several of the 21 Soviet participants in a trail-blazing course at the ILO'S International Training Center in Turin, Italy, had added other items to the list: annual leave, rate of production, medical insurance, maternity leave and child allowances.

For these Soviet managers, this course on modern enterprise management and business internationalism was a major step toward understanding the varied components of a free-market system as their country seeks to break away from the "command economy" that has long dominated Soviet life.

The notion of free collective bargaining between private-sector unions and employers is a concept unknown to them – a practice that has been totally alien to their past experience.

Alexander Louzine, who is among those at the Turin Center responsible for relations with Eastern Europe, said the main objective of the managers' course "is to challenge the traditional thinking of our top managers and unfreeze them for change."

Ten management training programs of this type were carried out at the ILO's International Training Center in Turin during May-October 1991. For a period of two to three weeks each course brought together some 20 "new managers" from Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia. Managers of small enterprises or directors of public institutions, they studied such subjects as the creation, development and profitability of small- and medium-scale enterprises, counseling services for enterprises and collective bargaining. Each course was completed by a study visit in Italy or to Germany, Belgium, France or Switzerland. One indication of the students' interest in these training courses: they paid the costs of tuition and housing themselves, that is, $2,500 per week.

Since its beginning in 1965 the Turin Center has trained thousands of students coming largely from the developing countries. At the present time there is also a large demand from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe now changing to a market economy. As of 1 January 1992 a "Europe" section currently being organized will become fully operational.

The Turin Center is already involved in the development of several ILO co-operation projects in Eastern Europe, such as, for example, assistance in the reopening of a management training center in Bucharest (Romania). Various other programs are either beginning or awaiting funds: training employers in collective bargaining and introductory courses on the creation of enterprises in Poland, training advisor-trainers for small- and medium-scale enterprises in Romania, and training in management of human resources in central and local administrations for all of the countries of the area. In addition, more than 100 trainees of the "new democracies" of Eastern Europe have received grants to attend courses developed at the Turin Centre.

Several factors explain the interest of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the Turin Center. First of all, the Center has been in existence for several decades and is located at the heart of the most industrialized region of Italy, in easy reach of the other countries forming the European Economic Community. Secondly, the Turin campus makes it possible to offer all residence and training facilities at the same location and at competitive prices. Finally, it is a multilateral, politically neutral training center where ideas and experiences may be freely exchanged; without a commercial or trainee-recruitment motive, the Turin Center is above all at the service of International Labor Standards and of the employers and the workers of the entire world. ■

Flexibility and diversity

ILO aid to Central and Eastern Europe in 1990 and 1991 involved 109 projects and activities distributed as follows: eight at regional level, 20 in Poland, 16 in Hungary, 21 in Czechoslovakia, 10 in Romania, 10 in Bulgaria, four in Yugoslavia and 20 in the USSR (all republics taken together).

The concern to meet as precisely as possible the given needs of the countries receiving aid required that the appropriate departments of the ILO employ flexibility in their methods and procedures to adapt aid as required and identified in the field. A few examples will give an idea of the diversity of these projects:

- **Better knowledge of International Labor Standards** and their requirements is the key to real progress in national labor legislation. In the first half of 1991 labor ministry officials of Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia received study grants for courses of several weeks' duration in Geneva. In April of 1990 the ILO helped to organise a seminar on International Labor Standards in the USSR and supplied written commentaries on the new trade union legislation.
- **Public employment services** should be completely reorganized, with particular regard to systems of training and vocational guidance, in order to co-ordinate effectively the supply and demand of labor. Aid in the form of consultations, personnel training and computer equipment is currently being supplied to four regions of Poland. Similar projects will soon begin in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. In three republics of the USSR (Byelorussia, Russia and Uzbekistan), an "integrated" project will be set up aimed at the modernization and reorganization of employment, training, vocational guidance and retraining services, with particular emphasis on integration of young workers and women and the creation of small enterprises.
- **Social security systems** must be substantially altered to allow for the risks associated with a market economy, particularly the risk of unemployment. The ILO's Social Security Department has provided technical assistance for this work in the majority of countries of the region.
- **Labor inspection in a market economy** should be a state function, independent of employers and trade unions but working in close collaboration with them in order to secure respect for protective legislation through preventive action. In October 1991 five-week tripartite missions were carried out by the ILO in Poland and Hungary to provide advice on the reorganization of such services. In the course of the last few years such missions have also taken place in several industrialized Western countries.
- **The social partners** should analyze their respective roles and abilities in order to initiate healthy and constructive industrial relations. The ILO has contributed to the organization of courses and seminars for trade unionists in the majority of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Consultancy missions for employers' organizations were held in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia, while Hungarian and Polish employers were provided with a seminar on the role of management staff in industrial relations.

Photo: J. Maillard/ILO

A trade union committee in session in an Italian enterprise. The issues with which trade unions have to deal, at both plant and national levels, are growing in range and complexity. Workers' education programs are a vital means of equipping unions to handle them.

More dynamic trade unions in a changing world

The race for competitive performance, if it were to break free from all control and regulation, could endanger collective action by trade unions in defence of their interests and their rights. Trade unions should be prepared to defend themselves against attacks that may be made against them, to preserve their image in society and show that they remain indispensable partners of governments and employers in the definition and implementation of economic and social policies.

This cry of alarm was raised by some thirty trade union officials from all regions of the world during the meeting of the Panel of Consultants on Workers' Education held in September at the ILO in Geneva.

Total trade union membership is declining in many countries due to unemployment, the growth of part-time work and the increasing use of sophisticated technology, the Panel stated. Trade unions are exposed to criticisms and attacks – often prejudiced – from various quarters. In addition, it is difficult to organize certain categories of workers whose numbers are steadily growing, such as migrants, rural and women workers, informal urban workers, and those who frequently change jobs.

Workers are not by any means opposed to changes, but they are not obliged to accept them unconditionally. Less than ever can they confine themselves to a purely defensive role; on the contrary, they should adopt a dynamic stance and if possible anticipate change, Panel participants found.

If unemployment is growing, as it is in many countries, the trade unions must not merely limit themselves to deploring the thinning down of their ranks, but rather examine how they can meet the needs of the jobless, even to the extent of forming "unemployed workers' sections" in their organizations.

The same goes for problems posed by the extreme mobility of workers. In increasingly multiracial societies and enterprises, fears aroused by the growth in numbers of foreigners are often a source of conflict and the rights of minorities can be jeopardized. Trade unions must oppose any unjust treatment of migrant workers, but also see that collective agreements are respected, including encouragement of the adoption of measures designed to discourage anyone from accepting sub-standard conditions of employment and work. Workers could well seek to use education and training as a means of overcoming these problems, based on the historic principle of the solidarity of working people.

Finally, in facing up to a rapid increase in the number of older and retired workers, trade unions should adapt their organization and practices in a way that will transform into an opportunity what appears at first sight to be a problem for them.

As for future ILO activities in workers' education, the Panel stressed the importance of close co-operation with UNESCO, given the relation between adult literacy and workers' education. "The best ILO manuals in the world are of little use to workers who cannot read, or who do not read any of the languages in which they are published," the Panel concluded, underlining the current importance of Arabic and Eastern European languages. Greater use should also be made of radio and television and, in general, innovative teaching methods.

In order to increase possibilities of reaching a much larger audience for workers' education, the ILO should concentrate its efforts on training worker educators and leaders. The needs of rural workers and women workers should continue to receive special attention.

Emphasizing the crucial importance of improved workers' awareness of International Labor Standards and trade union rights considered as an integral part of human rights, the Panel concluded that workers' education has a responsibility to give all possible assistance to the trade union movement in the search for solutions to the challenges it faces.

To this end, and the better to meet the current expectations of the workers of the world, workers' education programs, depending on the country, should endeavor to address such problems as structural adjustment and its social consequences, the transition from centrally-planned to market-oriented economies, the introduction of new technologies, development of management techniques, the strengthening of rural workers' organizations, equal opportunity and women's participation in trade unions, workers' access to education, occupational health and safety, the protection of the environment and the expansion of workers' education activities in the informal sector. ■

ILO Information appears in 17 languages, five times each year. It is published by the International Labor Office and is not an official record of the International Labor Organization. Opinions stated in signed articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Labor Office.
Editor-in-chief: Peter Sutcliffe.
Assistant Editor: Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman.
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ISSN 0379-1734

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Updating standards for a changing shipping industry

As technical innovation and structural changes reshape the shipping industry worldwide – with substantial effects on employment, working and living conditions – representatives of shipowners' and seafarers' have called for the updating of key ILO maritime standards.

Meeting in Geneva in October, the ILO's Joint Maritime Commission recommended that a Maritime Session of the International Labor Conference be held in 1996 to revise in particular Conventions dealing with wages, hours of work and manning, labor inspection, and the placing of seamen.

It proposed a partial revision of the "landmark" Convention No. 147 on minimum standards in merchant shipping, adopted in 1976, by the addition of relevant standards which have subsequently been created. More widespread ratification was urged of this instrument, which has to date been signed by 23 States together accounting for some 53 per cent of world merchant fleet tonnage.

The Commission agreed that the minimum wage figure for able seamen – contained in ILO Recommendation No. 109 – should be raised from $286 to $335, effective on 25 October 1991, and rising to $356 a year later.

It suggested changes in the formula used to revise the wage figure, in order to base it on a more representative list of countries and to take account of exchange rate fluctuations and other factors.

Countries were urged to take steps to protect the wages and other entitlements of seafarers in cases where the shipowner or manager became insolvent, and especially when seafarers were stranded in a foreign country.

In proposing revision of existing international maritime labor standards, the Commission underlined its support for the ILO's special maritime machinery, "which has ensured that maritime instruments take account of the international nature of shipping and the particular characteristics of seafaring as a way of life."

Many of the ILO's instruments were created at a time when the industry operated differently from today, with fewer seafarers serving under foreign flags. Major restructuring has taken place and internationalization has accelerated. Standards had to be kept abreast of change, and specific areas where revision may be needed should be identified.

The Commission asked the ILO to maintain its procedures for developing standards of specific maritime application, and urged governments and national and international organizations of employers and workers to ensure that the industry was consulted when proposals for instruments of general application were considered.

In recommending revision of Convention No. 109 on wages, hours of work and manning, the Commission noted wide-ranging changes in shipboard environment and the characteristics of seafarers' employment which were affecting such areas as work scheduling, hours of work and health and safety. It was necessary to bring the instrument into line with modern work practices, in particular in the areas of hours of work and manning, and to ensure that it reflected the importance of the fatigue factor in the manning and safety of ships.

Emphasizing the importance of protecting seafarers from recruitment malpractices, the Commission recommended the revision of Convention No. 9 on the placing of seamen and called for guidelines which would include, among other items, the principle that a seafarer must not pay for a job and the principles of freedom of choice of ship and freedom of choice of crew.

The Commission stressed the need for international action to address the question of drug and alcohol usage in the maritime industry, a question which can involve the safety, health and welfare of seafarers, the safety and security of the ship and the efficiency of shipping operations.

It asked the ILO to convene a tripartite meeting of experts on the subject next year with the aim of drafting guiding principles on drug and alcohol policies and programs in the industry, and of providing guidance on an ILO program for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, including the development of guidelines and educational material for prevention and control and guidelines on rehabilitation.

The Commission called for measures to promote the ratification of ILO maritime standards with special reference to freedom of association, collective bargaining and tripartite consultation. It also asked the ILO to study the effects of second or international register shipping on seafarers' working and living conditions, and the effects on seafarers of external ship management as against in-house ship's husbandry.

Other resolutions called for:

- application of standards on social security and on seafarers' welfare;
- seafarers' and shipowners' organizations to be enabled to serve as advisers to ILO meetings of member States on the Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control (a mechanism to strengthen the inspection of maritime safety and shipboard labor conditions);
- an early session of the Joint IMO-ILO Committee on Training to discuss standards for qualifications, certification and training for persons on board maritime mobile offshore units; and
- enhanced co-operation in the maritime sector, particularly on maritime training, between the ILO and other UN organizations. ■

Photo: J. Maillard/ILO

Child labor

Priorities for action

Although there is general agreement that child labor has to be abolished, there is less unanimity on how this is to be achieved. Views differ as to whether anything can be done at all unless basic structural changes are made, or as to whether an outright and immediate abolition of child labor is the best approach. Between those two extremes is the argument for a gradual and progressive raising of the minimum age for admission to work or employment combined with protective measures for those children who continue to work.

The debate is especially sharp as regards the possibilities for action in very poor countries where there is the largest concentration of child workers in the world. Asia and Africa alone account for well over 90 per cent of the total child labor population. The problem is especially serious in Africa where far more than 50 per cent of the children in several countries are not enrolled in school and could be working. This in part is due to the non-availability of schooling opportunities but, far more fundamentally, the result of mass poverty and underdevelopment. Many therefore believe that little can be done in practice under these circumstances because children need to work for their own survival and that of their parents, and that poor countries will be incapable of taking action to eliminate the problem until they achieve an adequate level of development.

But poverty should not be a barrier to action to combat child labor and to protect children, ILO senior official Assefa Bequele insists. "It is definitely possible, as can be seen from the experience of some developing countries, to bring about significant reductions in the incidence of child labor and extend protection to working children even at low levels of per capita income and development." He spells out specific priority areas of policy and action which governments in very poor countries can carry out to provide working children a greater measure of protection and as an essential first step toward the objective of the eventual elimination of child labor.

First and foremost is the identification and prohibition of child work in hazardous and unsafe activities. Millions of children in various parts of the developing world work under extremely difficult, abusive and exploitative conditions in various branches of industry and agriculture. Many are found working as domestic servants in private households where they may be subject to arduous and heavy work, excessively long hours, physical violence and sexual abuse; in cafes, restaurants and even bars and public entertainment places where legitimate work and child prostitution overlap; or on the streets, often under the threat of violence or even subject to systematic terror, beating and murder by street gangs and organized killing squads and sometimes the police under the guise of keeping the streets clean and safe, as recent reports have testified. The prohibition of work by children in occupations or activities which are manifestly dangerous to their health, safety and development should be an object of immediate policy intervention, says Mr Bequele.

Second, large numbers of child workers are at risk, mainly because of the early age at which they commence work. A suprisingly large number of children start work even before they are 10 years old, and are found working in such activities as brick-making, quarrying and the production of fireworks and matches. "Therefore a second area of priority action is the protection of the youngest and most vulnerable. Many countries have the capacity for, and some have demonstrated the feasibility of, banning child employment before the completion of compulsory primary education or before the age of 12 to 13 years." Such a measure would almost at a stroke reduce the overall incidence of child labor signficantly and provide protection to very young children.

These objectives are not unattainable, Mr Bequele adds. They are modest and feasible even in very poor countries. The fact that some developing countries have found it possible to take action should encourage others to do so. ■

* Assefa Bequele: "Combating child labor: contrasting views and strategies for very poor countries." *Conditions of Work Digest*, Vol. 10, No. 1/1991. *Child Labor: Law and practice*. ISBN 92-2-107751-9.

ILO INFORMATION
International Labor Office
CH-1211 Geneve 22

P. P.
1211 GENEVE 22

US – Readers' inquiries: please address to ILO Branch Office, Washington, D.C.